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Book review of:

Between God & Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change. By Katharine K. Wilkinson

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Growing awareness of the adverse effects humans are having on other species and the natural environment has prompted leaders and scholars of world religions to dig deeply into their traditions for promising ways of responding. Recently, religious organizations have been especially active in studying the phenomena that point to human-forced climate change and issuing statements that call for action at all levels of human endeavor. Their hope is to mitigate the present and projected repercussions on people today, especially the poor and vulnerable living in coastal areas and islands, and on future generations. Among prominent projects are the Catholic Climate Covenant championed by the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, the Jewish Climate Initiative supported by the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, and collaborative efforts by various

Christian (Baptist, Catholic, Episcopal, Evangelical, First Congregational, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and United Church of Christ), Jewish, and Islamic communities associated with Interfaith Power and Light.

In *Between God & Green*, Katharine Wilkinson focuses on Christian evangelical efforts before, during, and after senior leaders announced the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI) in 2006. This initiative surprised Wilkinson and others who had linked evangelicals with the conservative right of the Republican Party, climate change skeptics, and ongoing opposition to legislation aimed at mitigating climate change. The ECI was so intriguing to Wilkinson while she was completing her doctoral studies at Oxford University that she chose to concentrate her dissertation on the evangelical environmental movement. She studied a plethora of pertinent documents, interviewed twenty-seven evangelical leaders, and organized convocations of members of congregations in the southeastern part of the United States. She concluded that the ECI followed previous significant efforts by a growing number of evangelicals to address climate change from a biblically based perspective. Referring to these efforts as “climate care,” she probes why and how these evangelicals engaged this daunting global issue.

Wilkinson accomplishes her goal in six chapters. In the first chapter, she chronicles the development of evangelicalism in the United States from the eighteenth century to the present, the disparate views that emerged among evangelicals pertaining to social problems, efforts by scientifically informed evangelical scholars to respond to ecological issues by developing a biblically grounded “engaged ecotheology” (20), and some dynamic leaders who emerged toward the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries to generate the ECI. The second chapter focuses on attempts by some evangelicals to promote the ECI by developing and articulating a biblically based, scientifically informed theological reflection on climate change that better explains and motivates action. In the third chapter, she explores the “green spirit” that some evangelicals have shown by caring about and for the climate, and she probes in the fourth chapter their efforts to respond to and engage other evangelical leaders who balked at emphasizing climate care over traditional issues that had united evangelicals (e.g., abortion and homosexuality). She further addresses how these leaders departed from political alliances that had championed these issues (e.g., conservative Republicans) and collaborated with scientists as well as other secularists who did not share evangelical religious values.

Recognizing that the moderate agenda emerging from this engagement with climate care issues was primarily an elitist movement of evangelical leaders devoid of a widespread grass roots contingency, Wilkinson moves in the fifth chapter to share the diverse responses from two years of discussions with members of congregations throughout the southeastern part of the United States. From this research, she concludes that an “elusive” grass roots (108) element exists where scientific uncertainty undermines engagement with climate change and political ideologies strongly determine congregants' positions on the issues. In addition, she observes that individual responsibility reigns as the key paradigm for directly helping one's neighbor who is adversely affected by climate change, and addressing environmental and other issues through a structural process is rejected. Wilkinson concludes by arguing for “a robust public theology” that will “strengthen support for climate care and, in turn, prospects for a long-term movement” of evangelical congregants (110). In the final chapter, she examines the two major fissures among evangelical leaders who share a theological perspective but disagree on a way of addressing global climate change. Whereas Flourish advocates an individual-action approach, ECI is more structurally focused in its activism. Wilkinson laments this fissure because, as she explains in the conclusion of her monograph, she recognizes the need for a strong evangelical voice in the environmental movement.

Wilkinson caps her monograph with ten appendices of documents issued by evangelical leaders and groups referenced in her text. Among these are “On the Care of Creation” (1994), the “Oxford Declaration on Global Warming” (2002), the “Sandy Cove Covenant and Invitation” (2004), an excerpt from “For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility” (2004), “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action” (2006), “An Urgent Call to Action: Scientists and Evangelicals Unite to Protect Creation” (2007), “Principles for

Federal Policy on Climate Change” (2007), and “Vineyard Churches: Seven-Year Plan for American Evangelism” (2009). Also included is “A Southern Baptist Declaration on the Environment and Climate Change” (2008) and a list of key people involved in evangelical efforts. She also provides helpful notes and an extensive bibliography that might provide starting points for research by others.

As a Catholic, Christian theologian and ethicist, I am grateful for Wilkinson's monograph. The research it reflects, her careful analysis of the theological and political differences of evangelical leaders, and her efforts to categorize views held by the evangelicals with whom she had group discussions are commendable. The need she sees for a robust public theology looms large for evangelicals as it does for other religious communities, thereby requiring scholars to dig deeply into their traditions and bring to the fore the most promising approaches for addressing human-forced climate change. Wilkinson has contributed admirably to this ongoing scholarly effort by helping evangelicals understand their shared past, their diverse present, and the challenges they must meet if they are to present a united front. Perhaps the newly created Young Evangelicals for Climate Action will bring vigor into the mix and stimulate collaboration.

Wilkinson's text is also helpful for scholars, leaders, and members of other Christian denominations and religions who struggle with disparate voices that prevent a fully cohesive approach to major issues. One key to bringing the voices of a religious community into harmony is a fully articulated theology that is deeply embedded in their respective religious traditions. The risks to present and future generations demand immediate dedication to this task.